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ABSTRACT

Based on Jane Austen's novel "Pride and Prejudice," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that classics are those pieces of literature that continue to be popular long after they were written; classics tend to have universal themes; and Austen's writing has been updated and dramatized and, most likely, will continue to be. The main activity of the lesson involves students working in small groups to draft the script of a modern-day version of scenes from the novel. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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# TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:

Pride and Prejudice

**LENGTH OF LESSON:** Two class periods

**GRADE LEVEL:** 9-12

**SUBJECT AREA:** Literature

**CREDIT:** Alisa Soderquist, teacher, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia.

**OBJECTIVES:** Students will understand the following:

1. Classics are those pieces of literature that continue to be popular long after they were authored.

2. Classics tend to have universal themes.

3. Austen's writing has been updated and dramatized and, most likely, will continue to be.

**MATERIALS:**
For this lesson, you will need:

The novel *Pride and Prejudice*

Miscellaneous scenes that your community would consider acceptable from *Clueless*, the recent teen soap opera loosely based on Austen's *Emma*

**PROCEDURE:**

1. This project will give students an opportunity to demonstrate their familiarity with *Pride and Prejudice* by updating a selected scene from it to the 21st century. Begin this enterprise by asking students the following question: Although its setting and characters are certainly dated, *Pride and Prejudice* has remained a popular novel since its publication in 1813. Why do you think it has retained its popularity?

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2. After giving students some time to think about the question of *Pride and Prejudice*'s enduring popularity, ask students to list the elements of the novel that are universal:

- It's a great love story with twists, turns, and obstacles, and the right girl(s) and guy(s) ending up with each other.
- In addition to the multifaceted Elizabeth and Darcy, the novel presents stock characters we all understand (the interfering, well-intentioned but ridiculously foolish mother; the pompous Mr. Collins; the snobbish Miss Caroline Bigley; and the scoundrel Wickham).

3. Once students have distilled the plot and characters, have them work as a class to update these elements into a modern-day scenario. To illustrate what you have in mind, consider showing appropriate scenes from the movie *Clueless*, made in the 1990s and loosely based on Austen's novel *Emma*.

4. Then with the class, divide the modern-day scenario into a number of scenes that, taken together, will cover the entire plot line. Assign a different scene to each of several small groups who will draft an actual script for it.

5. Go over with the class the following important elements of a dramatic scene:

- The script of a scene must contain both dialogue (the conversations and asides of the characters) and stage directions (descriptions of setting, characters, and action). Not all descriptions show up in stage directions, however; sometimes playwrights drop descriptions of setting and of characters right into characters' dialogue.
- The characters might not resolve a problem or an issue in a scene, but a scene must contain a problem or an issue that the characters are considering, and a scene must end in a satisfying way rather than simply trail off.

6. Raise with the class the following questions about updating literature:

- How trendy should the locales and clothes be?
- Will the characters speak in a local dialect or in a language understandable throughout the English-speaking world?
- How do adapters handle content that in the 21st century smacks of sexism but that is critical to the plot or theme as envisioned by the original author nearly two hundred years ago?

7. After groups have completed their first drafts, share with them a checklist such as the following, giving them time to revise as necessary so that they can answer "yes" to all the questions.

CONTENT

Does the dialogue or do the stage directions clearly show the characters contemplating and dealing with a problem or an issue?

Does the scene end naturally, rather than artificially?

STYLE

Is the dialogue realistic and easy for an actor to say?

GRAMMAR, USAGE, MECHANICS

Have I checked to make sure capitalization, spelling, and matters such as agreement, comparison, and pronoun reference are correct?

8. Each group should get a chance to read its adaptation in front of the class. Here are pointers for how to proceed:

- Each student in a group should get a copy of that group's final manuscript.
- The members of the group should use their scripts to read the scene for the rest of the class. They may use props during their reading. As appropriate, actors should read or perform stage directions.

9. Once each group has performed, the audience should comment on strengths of the adaptation and parts of it that were unclear or need improvement.

**ADAPTATIONS:**

Instead of having small groups working on their own to adapt different sections of the scenario, select one section for the whole class to work on together—with you.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Consider the kinds of marriages that appear throughout *Pride and Prejudice,* including the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy. What kinds of relationships between a man and a woman did Jane Austen idealize?

2. Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen makes many statements about personal relationships. What are these statements? Are they still valid today? Why or why not?

3. The members of British society in *Pride and Prejudice* are very class conscious. Debate whether class consciousness is a part of American society. If not, do you think that affects our enjoyment and understanding of Austen's novel? Why or why not?

4. Identify the main characters in the novel and discuss what you feel is Austen's attitude toward each of them. Are the verbal portraits she paints flattering or otherwise?

5. Debate whether Elizabeth Bennet would still be considered a remarkable woman in the modern-day United States.

6. Although its setting and characters are certainly "dated," *Pride and Prejudice* has remained a popular novel for almost 200 years. Why do you think this is the case?

**EVALUATION:**

You can evaluate each group's scene and performance using the following three-point rubric:

- **Three points:** script contains all key ingredients from the selected section of the text; script clearly introduces a problem or an issue and develops or resolves it; actors read very clearly and in a well-paced manner

- **Two points:** script contains most key ingredients from the selected section of the text; script introduces but does not develop a problem or an issue; actors read clearly in a well-paced presentation of the scene

- **One point:** script omits key ingredients from the selected section of the text; script does not focus on a problem or an issue; actors read poorly

You may ask your students to contribute to the assessment rubric by determining what constitutes a clear and well-paced performance.

**EXTENSION:**

**Writing Up the Wedding**
A recent trend in newspaper stories about weddings is to describe not only the wedding and the participants but also the evolution of the newlyweds' relationship. These stories often include anecdotes and interviews with those who know the just-married very well. (You can review the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* for examples of this kind of story each week and share them with your students.)

Ask students to write a similar wedding news story about Elizabeth and Darcy. Their stories can include the traditional information—site of the nuptials, the names and careers of the parents of the bride and of the groom, a list of wedding attendants, and a description of what the bride and groom wore—as well as fictionalized quotations and anecdotes about the courtship by others in the novel. You may want to enhance this activity by asking your students to research wedding customs of Austen's time.

**Tackling Prejudice in Fiction**
In *Pride and Prejudice,* Austen displays a keen insight into human relationships through her portrayal of the manner in which Darcy and Elizabeth overcome their prejudices and learn to love each other. Ask your students whether they have ever had to overcome prejudice in any of their personal relationships—not only with romantic partners but also

with friends and family members. Ask students to consider the sources of their misperceptions and prejudices and the steps they took to clear them up; then lead a discussion about these experiences. What dramatic elements might they contain?

When the discussion is complete, ask your students to write a brief scene based on the preceding discussion or from a short story or play in which some form of prejudice or misunderstanding gets in the way of two characters falling in love with each other. Then have students trade stories with one another, read one another's work, and suggest ways the authors might depict the characters overcoming their prejudices. Give the writers time to finish their stories by resolving the conflicts they had set up.

**SUGGESTED READINGS:**

**Understanding *Pride and Prejudice***
Debra Teachman. Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997.
This book about *Pride and Prejudice* combines analysis of the novel and excerpts from significant primary documents of Austen's own time. These materials will help any reader understand the complexities of the novel. The book explores the major issues of 19th-century English society and compares those issues with issues in our contemporary world.

**Northanger Abbey**
Jane Austen. Konemann, 1999.
*Northanger Abbey* is one of Jane Austen's earliest novels, but it was not published until after her death—well after she'd become famous. Of all her novels, this one is the most literary in its subject matter. It satirizes a popular literary genre of Austen's day—Gothic fiction—and draws distinctions between reality and illusion.

**WEB LINKS:**

**The Republic of Pemberly**
Comprehensive site which includes lists of characters, authors' background, illustrations and time period links make this an excellent teacher resource.
http://www.pemberley.com/

**Jane Austen Society of North America**
Excellent list of Jane Austen related Internet sites.
http://www.jasna.org/

**Spark Notes Online Study Guides**
Helpful online, chapter by chapter study guide.
http://www.sparknotes.com/guides/pride/

**Jane Austen**
A text based version of *Pride and Prejudice* from The University of Maryland. Other Jane Austen books are also available.
http://www.inform.umd.edu/EdRes/ReadingRoom/Fiction/Austen/

**Penguin Putnam Inc.**
Select the online teachers guide for study materials on *Pride and Prejudice*.
http://penguinclassics.com/UK/resources/readers_guides/r_austen_pride.html

**VOCABULARY:**

**appraisal**
An act or instance of assessment.
**Context:**
When Elizabeth is able to come to a true appraisal of Mr. Darcy, she realizes his fine qualities and accepts his marriage proposal.

**astute**
Having or showing shrewdness and perspicacity.
**Context:**
Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* includes astute observations about the nature of love and marriage.

**degradation**
Decline to a low, destitute, or demoralized state; moral or intellectual decadence.
**Context:**
Mr. Darcy feels that a connection with Elizabeth's unpolished family will be a source of degradation.

**discernment**
The quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure.
**Context:**
Elizabeth prides herself on her discernment when judging people and must learn that she has made a mistake in the case of Mr. Darcy.

**orchestrate**
To arrange or combine so as to achieve a desired or maximum effect.
**Context:**
Mr. Darcy orchestrated accidental meetings in order to have contact with Elizabeth.

**scoundrel**
A disreputable person.
**Context:**
The scoundrel Mr. Wickham lies, cheats, and takes advantage of innocent people.

**suitor**
One who courts a woman or seeks to marry her.
**Context:**
Jane Austen is believed to have had one or two serious suitors in her life, but she never married.

**unrequited**
Not reciprocated or returned in kind.
**Context:**
For some time, Mr. Darcy had to live with the knowledge that his love for Elizabeth was unrequited.

**ACADEMIC STANDARDS:**

**Grade Level:** 6-8, 9-12
**Subject Area:** language arts

**Standard:** Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process.

**Benchmarks:**

**Benchmark 6-8:** Identifies specific devices an author uses to accomplish his or her purpose (e.g., persuasive techniques, style, literary form).

**Benchmark 6-8:** Reflects on what has been learned after reading and formulates ideas, opinions, and personal responses to texts.

**Benchmark 9-12:** Recognizes the effectiveness of writing techniques in accomplishing an author's purpose.

**Benchmark 9-12:** Identifies and analyzes the philosophical assumptions and basic beliefs underlying an author's work.

**Grade Level:** 6-8, 9-12
**Subject Area:** language arts

**Standard:** Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

**Benchmarks:**

**Benchmark 6-8:** Identifies specific questions of personal importance and seeks to answer them through literature.

**Benchmark 9-12:** Applies reading skills and strategies to a variety of literary texts (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, supernatural tales, satires, parodies, plays, American literature, British literature, world and ancient literature).

**Benchmark 9-12:** Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works.

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## Video Information and Comprehension Questions

**Video Description**
The perfidious nature of first impressions is at the heart of this Jane Austen classic. The complicated love story of Elizabeth and Darcy paints a brilliant tableau of middle-class English life while exploring the universal themes of love, marriage, and social expectations.

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ⓟ

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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## TITLE OF VIDEO:
Pride and Prejudice

**VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:**

**1. Where and when does *Pride and Prejudice*** take place?

**2. How is the title *Pride and Prejudice*** connected to the events of the novel?

**3. How is the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*** different from the other women in the novel?

**4. What was the political and social status of women during Jane Austen's time?**

**5. Why are the five Bennet sisters hampered in their search for husbands?**

**6. What is the source of the dramatic irony in *Pride and Prejudice*?**

**7. What aspects of society does Jane Austen satirize in *Pride and Prejudice*?**

**8. From where did Jane Austen get the material for *Pride and Prejudice?***

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# Pride and Prejudice

**VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:**

**1. Where and when does *Pride and Prejudice* take place?**
*Pride and Prejudice* is set primarily in an English village at the turn of the 18th century. Most of the characters are members of what was then called the gentry—what we would now think of as the middle or upper class.

**2. How is the title *Pride and Prejudice* connected to the events of the novel?**
The title *Pride and Prejudice* refers to the main characters in the novel, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, who must overcome their personal pride and often unfounded prejudices in order to recognize their true feelings for each other.

**3. How is the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice* different from the other women in the novel?**
Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*, is witty, charming, bold, rebellious, very daring, and very independent, while many of the other female characters are simply subservient and delicate.

**4. What was the political and social status of women during Jane Austen's time?**
Women during Jane Austen's time had very few legal rights, no access to colleges, and no opportunities for professional careers. Marriage was one of the only ways that women could obtain security in life.

**5. Why are the five Bennet sisters hampered in their search for husbands?**
The Bennet sisters have neither the promise of wealth nor the status that, in their society, would assure them an easy task in finding husbands.

**6. What is the source of the dramatic irony in *Pride and Prejudice*?**
The dramatic irony in *Pride and Prejudice* comes from the fact that the readers know Elizabeth and Darcy are well suited for each other, but the characters themselves do not.

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**7. What aspects of society does Jane Austen satirize in *Pride and Prejudice*?**
In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen satirizes her society's focus on wealth and social status, the hypocrisy and foolishness of many of its members, and the roles that her society expects women to play.

**8. From where did Jane Austen get the material for *Pride and Prejudice?***
Jane Austen's personal life provided much of the substance for *Pride and Prejudice.*

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